

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

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We have two reports tonight on the launch and the satellite, first, Robert Bazell, then Fred Francis.

BAZELL: For hours today as Discovery was on the pad ready to go, the countdown clock showed nothing, and there was little commentary. Then suddenly: VOICE OF LAUNCH CONTROL: T-minus 9 minutes and counting. The launch events are now being controlled by the ground launch sequencer.

BAZELL: For nine minutes, there was the usual commentary from Launch Control, but the communications of the astronauts and ground controllers were not broadcast as they have been on all previous manned spaceflights. VOICE OF LAUNCH CONTROL: Nine, eight, seven, we have main engines start. Four, three, two, one, ignition and liftoff, liftoff of Discovery, the first flight totally dedicated to (sic) Department of Defense mission.

BAZELL: The Discovery appeared to head east, but its course on takeoff and the orbit it will follow are secret. VOICE OF MISSION CONTROL: The vehicle now turning around to the...

BAZELL: The voice for Mission Control in Houston described the usual post-launch maneuvers which put the shuttle into orbit. VOICE OF MISSION CONTROL: ...Main engines are all running in normal pressures.

BAZELL: And then there was silence, as there will be for the rest of this mission, no sound and no pictures. Tomorrow, the astronauts will release a satellite from

Discovery's cargo bay. According to several reports, the satellite will monitor radio transmissions, telephone calls and other electronic signals in the Soviet Union and other countries. The Air Force has said that the purpose of the secrecy is to prevent the Soviets from tracking the satellite. Many intelligence experts outside the government say the Soviets will have no problems, despite the precautions, but the military has sent a message with this shuttle mission. It wants its operations in space kept secret from now on. Even the length of the mission is secret. The landing time will be announced only 16 hours in advance. Robert Bazell, NBC News, Cape Canaveral.

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NP02>SPACE SHUTTLE 2>FRANCIS: What this Soviet officer sees in the field and then reports by radio can be intercepted, decoded and translated by American intelligence. The science of spying on the Soviets has been that good for years. With today's launch, it will get better. The new satellite is reportedly called *Aquacade. It will join four or five other signal-intelligence satellites called *Sigents, already up there. But Aquacade is special. It has the capacity to scoop up the entire radio-frequency spectrum, microwave traffic and other communications. It can take selected signals and transmit them in short burst to a listening post in Pine Gap, Australia, which in turn relays the Soviet signals to the National Security Agency at Fort Mead, Md., for interpretation. National security specialist James *Banford says all those signals can be in American hands almost instantaneously. JAMES BANFORD: It'll be able to pick up weaker signals because it'll have larger antennas, and it will probably have a better ability to relay that information in real time too, to the Earth.

FRANCIS: The new satellite is also special because it's reported by space experts that it can be maneuvered while in orbit, making it very difficult for the Soviets to locate. Those commands come from this satellite-control facility at Sunnyvale, Calif. It is from Sunnyvale that we oversee the growing fleet of spy platforms, not only to hear but also to watch and feel what the Soviets are up to. Today's mission is the first of 16 military shuttle flights in the next five years, launching more advanced technology into space to build America's intelligence network. Fred Francis, NBC News, the Pentagon.